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SUBJECT: BEDIE, OUATTARA, AND BANNY REACTIONS TO THE OUAGA AGREEMENT

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1B. ABIDJAN 242

Classified By: AMBASSADOR AUBREY HOOKS FOR REASONS 1.4 B/D.

11. (C) Former President Bedie, former Prime Minister Ouattara, and current Prime Minister Banny told the Ambassador on March 5 that they are cautiously optimistic concerning the Ouaga Agreement signed the previous day. They all noted, however, that the agreement raises as many questions as it answers, and ultimately implementation of the agreement will depend on political will, especially on the part of President Gbagbo. None of the three seemed to have made a thorough analysis of the agreement, and much of their commentary had to be solicited with specific questions. They are all now in a wait-and-see mode.

12. (C) Ouattara expressed the hope that the Ouaga Agreement will take Cote d'Ivoire quickly to elections. He quoted President Compaore as saying that President Gbagbo is tired of the crisis and is suffering from health problems. Ouattara observed that President Gbagbo may finally be prepared to turn the page. Ouattara made it very clear, however, that the Ouaga Agreement is an agreement between the two belligerents, not among all the political actors. He confirmed that he plans to participate in the Permanent Council for Consultation called for in the agreement. Ouattara commented that failure to implement the Ouaga Agreement could deepen the divide between the North and South, thus prolonging the crisis by years.

13. (C) President Bedie was rather skeptical that the agreement will be faithfully implemented. Furthermore, he did not agree to institutional changes, such as changing the prime minister. He emphasized that the agreement must remain within the framework of UNSC Resolution 1721. Bedie opined that President Gbagbo was motivated by a desire to get rid of PM Banny and to make a deal with Soro to organize elections that would not be credible. Bedie said that he could not give his full approval to the Ouaga Agreement, but that he would participate in the Permanent Council for Consultations. He had not yet decided whether his PDCI party would participate in the new government called for in the agreement.

14. (C) Prime Minister Banny is clearly hurt by being sidelined by the Ouaga Agreement, although he tried to cover it up with a jovial "I'm waiting like everybody else" attitude. He tried to associate himself indirectly with the agreement by calling himself the apostle of direct talks as he was the first to make that proposal. Secondly, there is nothing new in the agreement that he had not proposed already, with the exception of the possibility of registering to vote and obtaining an identity card without first acquiring a certificate of nationality. Banny said he therefore has no problems with the substance of the agreement. However, what is omitted is as important as what is said. The agreement refers to the formation of a new government, although no one has explained to him how that is

going to be done. He had earlier asked President Gbagbo for a briefing on the direct talks, but Gbagbo had said he would call Banny as soon as he had something concrete. The agreement has been signed, but Banny has yet to hear from Gbagbo. Banny said he is waiting to hear from Gbagbo and Soro as to next steps, but in the meantime he is continuing to work, at least at the sectoral level (i.e. arranging deckchairs on the Titanic).

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